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Gamification: the key to sustainability engagement and behaviour change?



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Gamification uses gaming elements to influence real-world behaviour. This makes gamification both a powerful tool to engage with activists, and the newest weapon in the fight against excessive carbon emissions.

Global concentrations of CO₂ are now 50% higher than before the industrial revolution. The result: increasing temperatures, melting glaciers, frequent extreme weather events and climate refugees being forced from their homes. These are sobering consequences and we need a solution that encourages people to take greater positive action.

It's fair to say that the majority of people living in western society do care about the planet but the reality for them is that climate change is somewhat

abstract. When you're living in the leafy suburbs and your only notion of climate change concerns starving polar bears and diminishing rainforests, visualising how it affects you individually is hard to imagine. You can see why it can be hard to motivate people to change their behaviour. But how can we reach these casual climate activists?




Changing behaviours

You need to first accept that an inconvenient combination of factors surrounding climate change makes it hard to motivate people.

Fortunately, there are proven strategies, accompanied by support and engagement to tackle this problem. Academic research asserts psychological techniques and theories to design campaigns and programmes that increase sustainable behaviour. This includes value-based communication, which is a way of communicating information that's tailored to the audience's specific values. Other techniques range from evoking empathy, to normative modelling; the method of demonstrating something to other people within similar social circles who are already performing the behaviour.

There are also other techniques based on emerging theoretical models. Gamification is one such technique gaining increased attention in the world of climate change and sustainability.



What is gamification?

Gamification is the use of gaming elements within non-gaming contexts to influence real-world behaviour. Gamified programmes take the features of games that keep players' attention, like points, badges, leaderboards and challenges, and apply them to real-world situations that otherwise might seem mundane or boring to increase engagement. These gaming building blocks are used to engage users, solve problems and drive specific behaviours.

Gamification is increasingly popular and can be used in lots of different contexts, such as education, health or business settings. Many companies have introduced gamified schemes to increase customer or employee engagement with great success.

The science behind gamification

Both individuals and businesses often think that acting positively for climate change presents a trade-off between short-term and long-term benefits. Decades of [work by psychologists](#) indicates that we tend to overvalue benefits in the short term compared to those of the long term; so-called *temporal discounting*. Benefits in the future can lose their value or meaning if they are perceived as being too far away. Put simply – people are often unwilling to make changes or sacrifices in the short term because they don't get an immediate reward.

The result often presents an attitude-behaviour gap. People are concerned about the environment but often fail to consistently integrate this concern into their daily behaviour. This same gap is the reason why a person may often be aware – *and willing to do something* – about the plastic crisis but then at the

same time, without thinking about it, find themselves thirsty and run to the vending machine to grab a bottle of Coke.

This gap between our choices and our values makes it hard to tackle big-picture issues like climate change, which rely on sweeping behaviour change across society. Fortunately, gamification helps enforce those positive behaviours with small and regular rewards.



How does gamification influence sustainability engagement?


In recent years, gamification has gained increasing attention from the climate change and sustainability movement after recognising the advantages of engaging people around environmental issues. These advantages include:

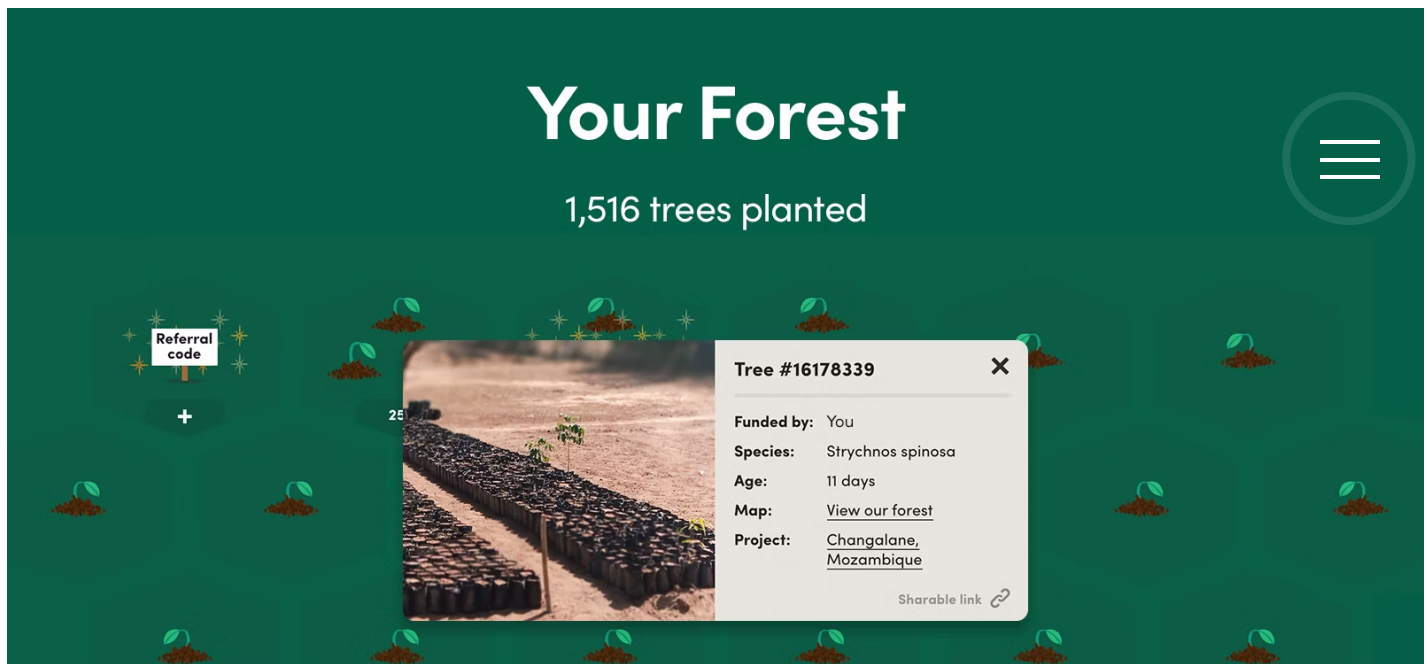
- **Reaching a broader audience** – Ambitious carbon reduction goals require high participation rates. Gamification can make subjects attractive to some people who otherwise may not be inclined to care about climate change, motivating a diverse group of users to get involved.
- **Driving competition** – Introducing an element of competition means that people are more likely to enact behavioural change. For example, a US company called Opower is using the element of social competition by equipping homes with sensors enabling residents to compare their household energy consumption with their neighbours, and broadcasting their achievements on Facebook. They now work with over 100 energy companies and are so effective that in 2016, they were able to achieve the

equivalent of 2 tera-watt hours of electricity savings. That's enough energy to power every home in Miami for more than a year.

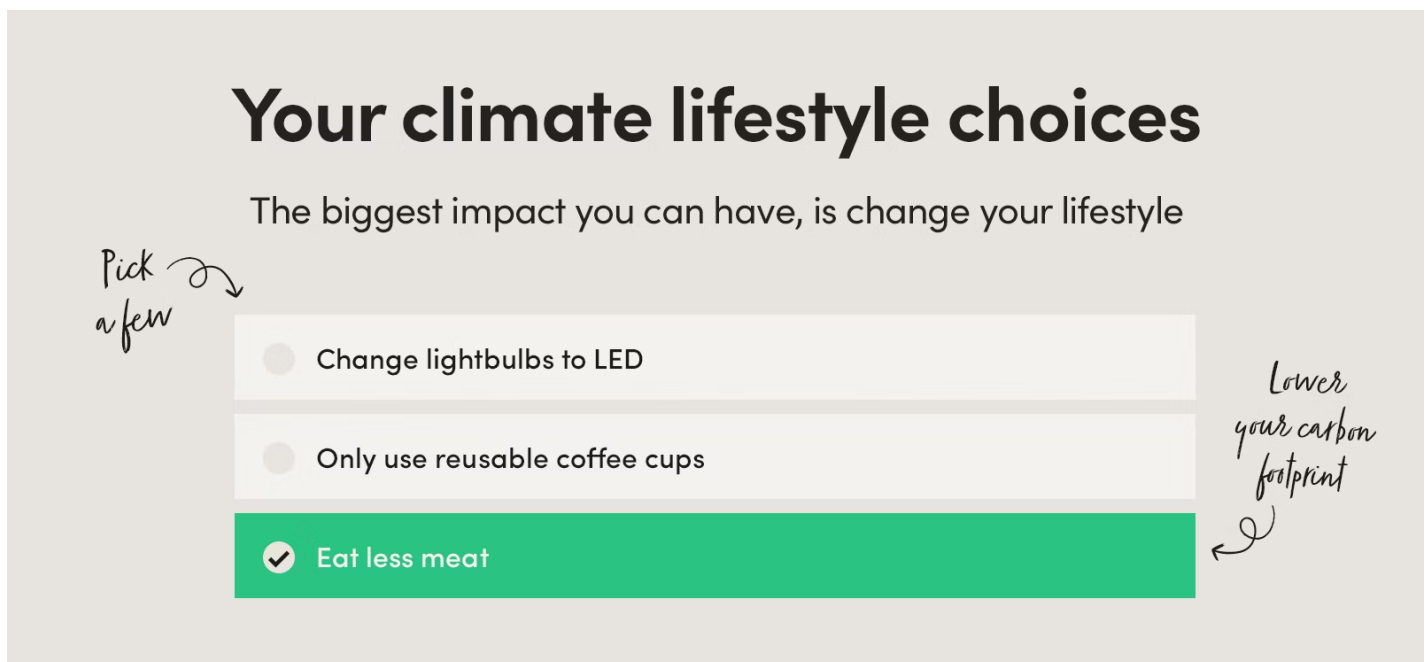
- **Demonstrating social norms** – Research shows how people are more likely to perform a behaviour if they think that lots of other people are also doing it. Sustainability gamification often features leaderboards, allowing you to see others taking action and subsequently normalising it. In fact, [one study](#) found that normative messaging increased the re-use of towels in hotel rooms – the most effective message for driving behavioural change was: *75% of guests who stayed in this room used their towels more than once.*
- **Rewards drive engagement** – Being rewarded for certain achievements motivates people to work towards goals and complete them. For example, achieving badges when reaching a certain number of points or carrying out a certain behaviour is a great way to incentivise good deeds.

Dedicated scientific journals, particularly those looking at energy savings, state that gamified applications can help users change their behaviour to be more conscious of environmental issues. [One study looking at techniques to promote eco-driving with battery electric vehicles](#) found that the use of game design elements significantly reduced energy consumption compared to normal. Similar findings show encouraging behavioural change for [water conservation](#) and [sustainable tourism practice](#).





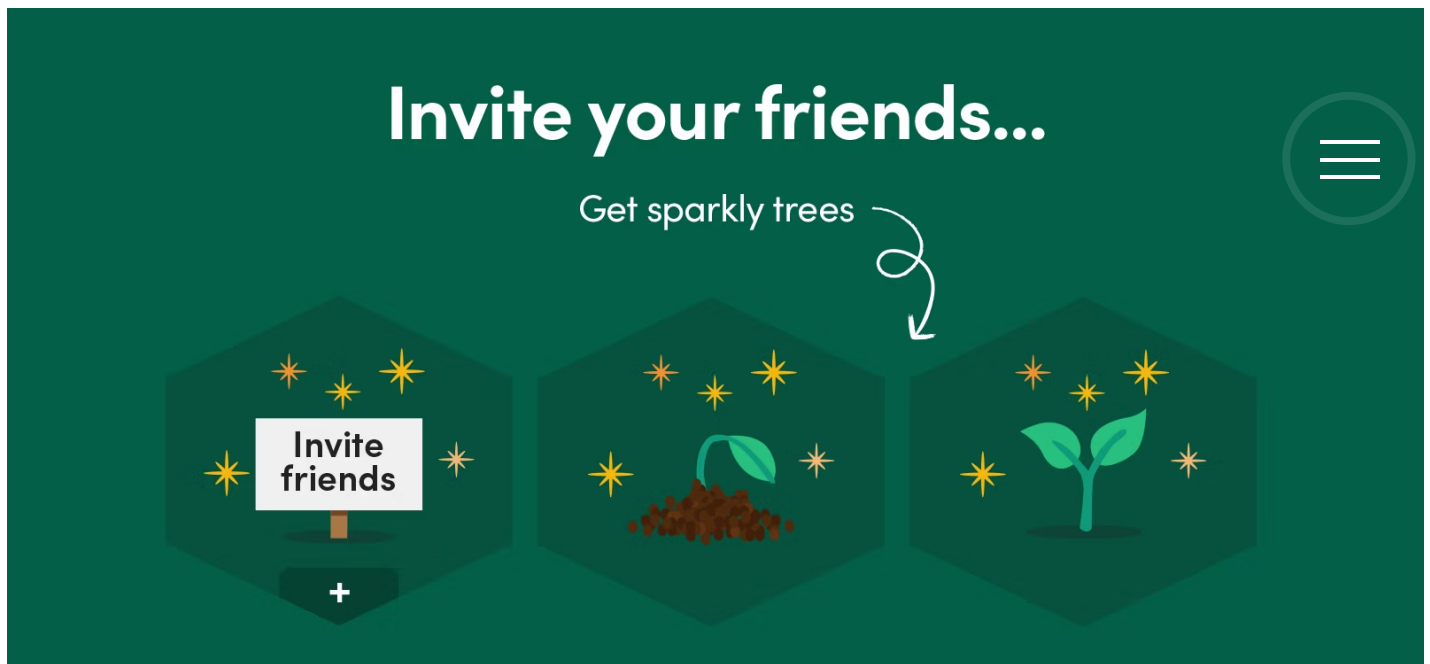
A dedicated goals section – This part of your profile lets you set climate lifestyle goals. These include not supporting fast fashion, eating a vegan diet or even line-drying your clothes. By making these visible on your profile, and being able to tick them off when you've achieved them, we hope to motivate users to make more climate-friendly choices.



Leaderboards – Individual users, businesses and Sparkly Tree referrals all get their own leaderboards. Healthy competition between peers is good. Plus – it motivates people to achieve as much climate action as possible in their quest to beat others. For example, you strive to plant more trees and reach the top of the leaderboard. Just ask the Ecologi team about healthy competition...



Planting Sparkly Trees – 18% of our Ecologi account subscribers have been referred by another user. Refer a new subscriber and Ecologi Sparkly Trees appear on your profile as a tile with flashing sparkles. This small gesture is mighty effective and encourages users to get their friends and family to sign up, and ultimately increase a positive climate impact.



Badges to show off your progress – Earn badges for the amount of time you're Climate Positive. We award badges for the number of trees funded, the number of sparkly trees you acquire, the tonnes of carbon you offset and for reaching top positions on the leaderboard. These motivate our users to engage in even more positive climate impacting activities to achieve these awards. Who doesn't love a badge and well-earned recognition?



Gamification normalises and incentivises helping the planet

We need everyone to care about our cause and take meaningful action. It's the only way we'll have a proper impact on the climate crisis. Gamification is just one of the innovative strategies we're using to get people interested and involved – thanks to the use of gaming elements in non-game contexts to influence real-world behaviour.


Our goal is to encourage sustainability and offset carbon emissions – but we want to have fun along the way.

[Sign up today and join the movement.](#)



How our partners also used gamification

Some of our partners have gone even further with gamification and are using real games to engage people and motivate them into action. Otherwise dubbed as *serious games*, this technique does not require real-world activities to complete. Serious games are intended to inspire behaviour changes through education and provoking thoughts and emotions.



Alba: A Wildlife Adventure

Our partners UsTwo had major success with their game, *Alba: A Wildlife Adventure*. It follows Alba as she visits her grandparents on a Mediterranean island. She is ready for a peaceful holiday but when she sees an animal in danger, she takes action. Players join Alba as she sets up an organisation to help save the island. This game inspires action through play by integrating themes of environmental conservation and sustainability.

The *serious games* theory suggests that by taking environmental action in the game, users are more likely to translate this into their own lives. For *Alba: A Wildlife Adventure*, just playing the game results in climate impact in the real world as well; for every copy of the game that is downloaded or sold, UsTwo plants one tree with Ecologi. They aim to plant 1 million trees in total. [Check out their forest here.](#)

🌟 Ecologi x ustwo games - Alba has planted 1 mill...



Terragenesis – transforming worlds

Ecologi recently partnered with Tilting Point to plant real trees based on players' actions in the game *TerraGenesis*. This is a mobile terraforming simulator that asks players to take barren worlds and transform them into new homes for humanity.

TerraGenesis now plants trees based on actions that players take in the game, including daily logins, ad views, completion of missions and more. Players can monitor their personal impact as well as that of the *TerraGenesis* community via an in-game hub. Players also unlock rewards as they reach tree-planting milestones. This is an innovative gamification approach that involves actions that players take within the game to transform virtual worlds. In doing so, their gaming actions actually help to reforest and rewild our very own planet. You can [view the TerraGenesis forest here](#).

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Reason for request

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